

AGENDA ITEM III A

PROPOSED NEW ACADEMIC PROGRAM

RIVER PARISHES COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Associate of General Studies

CIP Code 24.0102

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

River Parishes Community College (RPCC) was chartered as a comprehensive community college by the Legislature in 1997 and opened in August, 1999. The College serves students primarily in Ascension, Assumption, St. James, and St. John parishes. If approved, this degree would be the first degree offered at the institution.

STAFF SUMMARY

1. Description

A common degree offering at community colleges, the Associate of General Studies is designed for students who have not decided on a major and wish to transfer to a degree program not related to Liberal Arts or General Science at a baccalaureate institution. Typically, students pursuing this degree organize their coursework around the RPCC's general education requirements (totaling 29 credit hours). In addition to the required general education credits, students are expected to take 18 credit hours in a major area of concentration. In these latter courses, students must earn a C or better, and nine of them must be earned in residence at the college. Students also take 18 hours in "required related courses" outside the area of concentration, after consulting their academic advisors. The degree requires a total of 65 credit hours.

When this proposal was sent to other in-state institutions for comment, several reviewers expressed concern about the extent to which this degree's coursework would be transferable to proximate institutions. When directed to supply more detail about transfer and articulation, the College replied as follows:

In our contacts with the universities to which our students will transfer, the receiving institutions have agreed to accept the crosswalk courses [listed in the Statewide General Education Articulation Matrix and the Business Matrix] and to examine the remainder of the student's transcript case by case. In an effort to assist in that process, RPCC has visited LSU, Southern-BR, Southeastern, UNO, and Nicholls State to discuss student transfer issues. We have established a contact person in the admissions office at each institution, and we have left them a package of standard materials. When an RPCC student transfers, we supply the receiving institution with copies of course outlines, syllabi, and the professor's credentials for their review. To our knowledge, we have successfully

transferred students to all of the above as well as Northwestern and LSU-A.

2. Need

The College currently offers no degree programs to students of the four parishes it serves. The proposal notes that RPCC student registration patterns suggest that the new degree program “should in no way compete with Baton Rouge Community College’s General Studies program” because the vast majority of students come from Ascension (not East Baton Rouge) Parish.

3. Students

Based upon high school graduate rates in RPCC’s service area, census data, and Board of Regents’ data, the College projects the following *overall* enrollment figures, approximately 63% of which, in any given year, represent FTE (full-time equivalence):

1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
250	500	750	1003	1368	1847

The College reports that its enrollment projections for the first two years have been substantiated. Of these students, the College estimates that approximately 70% will enroll in the General Studies program. This estimate is based on a survey of current students and projections that high school students in the service area will not all meet selective admissions requirements at nearby four-year universities.

4. Faculty

All courses for this degree are being taught by current full and part-time faculty whose primary responsibility is classroom/laboratory teaching. Among other responsibilities, full-time faculty teach 15 credit hours each semester and are required to hold published office hours. All faculty meet SACS criteria: they have completed at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline, hold at least a master’s degree, or hold a master’s degree with a major in the teaching discipline. The average student-faculty ratio for the college and this degree program is expected to be 24:1.

5. Library

The library collection was dedicated in January, 2001. RPCC contracted with a book vendor to purchase and catalog 4,000 volumes appropriate for the academic level and courses offered by the 2000-2001 academic year. The initial collection includes a basic reference collection as well as a core collection in the arts, sciences, and humanities. The Learning Resource Center (next to the library) is a member of the Louisiana Library Network (LOUIS) consortium, which provides faculty and students with electronic databases and access to indices, abstracts, and full-text journal articles. The College also participates in the Southeastern Library Network (Solinet), a non-profit library cooperative that provides resources for the southeastern U.S. and includes more than 800 institutions. Inter-library loans for students and faculty are secured through this participation, as well as through participation in

OCLC, LALINC, and DEEDNet.

Based on current enrollment estimates, the College projects that library expenditures needed for the first five years of the proposed program will be:

2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
\$149,255	\$152,723	\$161,025	\$170,252	\$178,896

The College notes that “funding noted above will not by itself be sufficient to allow the library to accumulate 40,000 volumes within five years. The College will seek assistance from the Emerging College Fund or a special appropriation to secure additional funding for those acquisitions.” Moreover, the college projects a need for additional space to house the collection.

6. Facilities/Equipment

The newly-formed College occupies two buildings dedicated to teaching, administration, and student services. For the five hundred projected students in academic year 2000-01, there are five classrooms, two science labs, a large computer lab, and a learning center next to the library. Educational equipment, technology and furniture has been provided with \$700,000 in bond money. Some temporary office space is available for faculty, but at present all faculty members are housed in a separate, leased facility one mile from campus. A newly-renovated building has now made some faculty office space available on campus.

7. Administration

The proposal states that “the General Studies program will be administered by the Vice Chancellor/Dean of Academic Studies. At the present time, RPCC is too small to be divided into departments or divisions. As the College expands, the program may be coordinated by a faculty member on re-assigned time.”

8. Accreditation

This program is not eligible for accreditation.

9. Costs

This degree will not require any unique or additional funding over and beyond that used to build the basic infrastructure of the College. Indeed, this degree is part of the basic infrastructure being built. The proposal states that “existing full and part-time faculty are already teaching the courses which comprise the College’s general education requirements and courses that will be used to fulfill all of RPCC’s initial degree programs. Bond money is being used to purchase educational furniture and equipment that will support all the College’s initial programs.” The base state appropriation for RPCC is \$1,500,000 per year.

In addition, if the College meets its enrollment goals, tuition revenue is expected to establish the following minimum budget figures:

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Student head count	750	1013	1368	1847	2216
Total tuition	\$438,375	592,099	800,353	1,079,572	1,295,252
Total min. budget	\$1,938,375	2,092,099	2,300,353	2,579,572	2,795,252

STAFF ANALYSIS

RPCC's choice to offer this degree is sensible, and the degree itself follows established curricular norms of its type. Current arrangements for establishing course articulation and student transfers appear satisfactory. Student interest in the program appears high. Faculty appear to be well-qualified, and it is commendable that faculty offices are now being made available on the campus itself. The new library and learning resource center, connected as they are to other resources, still require greater financial support if they are to be adequate to projected increases in student enrollment. Proposed program administration is satisfactory. As the program consists solely of general education coursework offered by the College through a variety of academic departments, a separate program budget is probably impossible to define. The staff believes, though, that general State appropriations for college operations (a minimum of \$1,500,000) should be adequate to address program needs.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The staff recommends that the Academic and Student Affairs Committee grant approval for the request from River Parishes Community College to establish an Associate of General Studies program (CIP Code 24.0102), effective June 1, 2001.